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Promotion and protection of the rights of children

Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Report of the Secretary-General**

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I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, by its resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989, adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention was opened for signature in New York on 26 January 1990 and entered into force on 2 September 1990, the thirtieth day after the deposit with the Secretary-General of the twentieth instrument of ratification or accession.

2. Further, the Assembly, by its resolution 54/263 of 25 May 2000, adopted two optional protocols to the Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

3. On 4 December 2000, the Assembly adopted resolution 55/79, entitled "The rights of the child", which dealt with the implementation of the Convention; protection and promotion of the rights of children; protection and promotion of the rights of children in particularly vulnerable situations, and non-discrimination against children; the plight of children living and/or working on the streets; refugee and internally displaced children; children with disabilities; migrant children; prevention and eradication of the sale of children and of their sexual exploitation and abuse, including child prostitution and child pornography; and protection of children affected by armed conflict. By the same resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it, at its fifty-sixth session, a report containing information on the status of the Convention and the problems addressed in the resolution. The present report, submitted to the Assembly in pursuance of that request, contains information on the activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and information submitted by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

II. Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

4. As at 2 July 2001, the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been ratified or acceded to by 191 States. In addition, one State had signed the Convention.[1]

5. As at 2 July 2001, the optional protocol to the Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict had been ratified by 4 States and signed by 80, and the optional protocol to the Convention on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography had been ratified by 3 States and signed by 73.[2]

III. Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

6. By resolution 2001/75 of 25 April 2001,[3] the Commission on Human Rights (a) profoundly concerned that the situation of children in many parts of the world remained critical as a result of poverty, inadequate social and economic conditions in an increasingly globalized world economy, pandemics, natural disasters, armed conflicts, displacement, exploitation, illiteracy, hunger, intolerance, discrimination, disability and inadequate legal protection, (b) alarmed by the reality of daily violations of children's rights, (c) supporting the preparatory process for the special session of the General Assembly on children, (d) welcoming the integration of child-related issues into the preparations for and the outcome of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, and (e) welcoming also the convening at Yokohama, Japan, in December 2001, of the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, inter alia, requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations mechanisms, all relevant organs of the United Nations system, in particular special representatives, special rapporteurs and working groups, regularly and systematically to include a child rights perspective in the fulfilment of their mandates. Further, the Commission called upon States parties to accept, as a matter of priority the amendment to article 43, paragraph 2, of the Convention; reaffirmed the importance of ensuring adequate and systematic training for professional groups working with and for children; and called upon all States to put an end to impunity, where applicable, for all crimes, including where children are victims, in particular those of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, and to bring perpetrators of such crimes to justice. The Commission decided, with regard to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, to request the Secretary-General to ensure the provision of appropriate staff and

facilities from the United Nations regular budget for the effective and expeditious performance of the functions of the Committee, and invited the Committee to continue to enhance its constructive dialogue with the States parties and its transparent and effective functioning.

7. The Committee on the Rights of the Child held its twenty-fifth to twenty-seventh sessions at the United Nations Office at Geneva, from 18 September to 6 October 2000, 8 to 26 January 2001 and 21 May to 8 June 2001, respectively.[4]

8. At its twenty-seventh session, the Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted a statement for submission to the Preparatory Committee for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. It also adopted a statement for submission to the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth special session for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in New York from 6 to 8 June 2001, and a statement for submission to the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children at its third session, held in New York from 11 to 15 June 2001.

9. In conformity with rule 75 of its provisional rules of procedure, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has decided periodically to devote one day of general discussion to a specific article of the Convention or to a theme related to the rights of the child in order to enhance understanding of the contents and implications of the Convention.

10. At its twenty-third session, the Committee decided to devote, in September 2000 and in September 2001, one day of its general discussion to the theme, "Violence against children". To allow for more detailed consideration, the Committee decided to focus the discussion in 2000 on violence suffered by children living in institutions managed, licensed or supervised by the State, in the context of concerns of law and public order. In 2001, the focus would be on the problems of violence suffered by children in schools and within the family.

11. Pursuant to its discussion of State violence against children on 22 September 2000, the Committee recommended, inter alia, that: (a) the Secretary-General be requested, through the General Assembly, to conduct an in-depth international study on the issue of violence against children, as thorough and influential as the 1996 report of the expert of the Secretary-General, Graça Machel, on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1); (b) United Nations human rights mechanisms with a mandate to consider individual complaints concerning violations of human rights identify ways in which to respond more effectively to individual complaints concerning violence against children; and (c) effective measures be sought to strengthen existing United Nations human rights mechanisms so as to ensure that violence against children and the situation of children living and/or working in the streets are adequately addressed.

12. Protecting the rights of the child has become a major theme in the work programme of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The High Commissioner considers wide-ranging and important issues, such as children in armed conflict, exploitation of child labour, sale and trafficking of children, juvenile justice, child prostitution and child pornography, and violence and discrimination against the girl child. In addressing the rights of children, the Office has established long-standing cooperation with UNICEF, as well as with other United Nations programmes and bodies.

13. In November 1996, the High Commissioner launched a plan of action to strengthen the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The plan became operational in July 1997 and, as at July 2001, five staff members were carrying out work related to it. In addition to providing substantive support to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, such work is aimed at assisting States in meeting their reporting obligations and following up the recommendation of the Committee.

14. The High Commissioner has repeatedly, including during the Millennium Summit, called upon States to ratify the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, in order to increase the protection of children throughout the world.

15. The Office of the High Commissioner actively participated in the three sessions of the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children. It followed closely the drafting process of the outcome document, entitled "A world fit

for children", and, inter alia, expressed the hope that the declaration and plan of action would take human rights into account and contain adequate references to the importance of human rights education and juvenile justice.

16. In order to highlight the links between the special session of the General Assembly on children and the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, the Office of the High Commissioner and UNICEF convened, on 10 April 2001, during the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on Human Rights, a panel discussion on racism, children and the role of education. The High Commissioner, the Rapporteur of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the right to education, and representatives of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNICEF, the International Save the Children Alliance and the National Black Youth Forum (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) participated in the event.

17. On 23 March 2001, the Office of the High Commissioner convened an informal meeting of representatives of United Nations programmes and bodies and of non-governmental organizations to reflect upon and discuss ways in which to reinforce existing cooperation with the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The meeting provided an opportunity for partners to reflect on means to improve the mainstreaming in their work of recommendations adopted by the Committee. All parties agreed that existing cooperation was satisfactory but could be improved, mainly with regard to the reporting role of national human rights institutions or ombudspersons under the Convention and the work of partners vis-à-vis the pre-sessional working group of the Committee. Participants also agreed on measures to be taken or reinforced in their own organization with regard to improving the follow-up at the national level of the Committee's recommendations.

IV. Protection and promotion of the rights of children

18. The promotion of the rights of children has been marked in 2001 by the preparations for the special session of the General Assembly on children, in which UNICEF serves as substantive secretariat, under the guidance of the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee. In June 2000 and January and June 2001, three sessions of the Preparatory Committee were held. UNICEF actively participated in the negotiations, and supported or organized side events to disseminate information on and promote the discussion of specific topics relating to human rights and the rights of children prior to the special session.

19. In preparation for the special session, the Secretary-General, with the support of UNICEF, conducted a review of the progress made in the decade since the convening of the World Summit for Children in 1990. Over 130 Governments submitted detailed reports on the situation of children in their countries. Evident in the majority of reports was the degree to which the Convention on the Rights of the Child was used as the basis for the analysis, the standards therein applied as the benchmarks against which States were self-critical about the positive and not-so-positive trends in their countries.

20. In order to create public awareness and promote the call for action on child-related issues, UNICEF, together with non-governmental organizations, created the Global Movement for Children. The Movement launched the "Say Yes for Children" campaign, which was led by international personalities. The campaign is reaching every part of the globe, rallying people behind 10 overarching principles that are directly based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The goal of the campaign is to build a groundswell of support that will encourage leaders to live up to existing commitments and to expand upon these at the special session on children.

21. Several initiatives took place at the regional level, aimed at raising awareness of the importance of the rights set forth in the Convention. In West and Central Africa, advocacy towards the Movement continued with the organization of and/or participation in several regional, continental and global events on critical rights-related issues, including on children in conflict, psychosocial support, trafficking in children, and early marriage. In support of these meetings, efforts to raise awareness of and document the plight of children were undertaken at the national and regional levels, in coordination with intergovernmental and regional organizations, organizations of the United Nations system and national and international non-governmental organizations. These efforts were

directed at various sectors of society, including political decision makers and professionals, and civil society.

22. These meetings resulted in increased governmental awareness of the rights of children and the development of projects and activities within the framework of cooperative programmes. For example, they led to the design in over 10 countries of specific programmes to address the worst forms of child labour and child trafficking and to plans for the rehabilitation of children affected by armed conflict in Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In South Asia, as part of the regional effort for the Global Movement for Children, discussions were also started with MTV Asia at Mumbai, with a view to its hosting a series of activities linked with the special session of the General Assembly on children. These activities include promotional spots that will be shown on MTV Asia, an MTV/UNICEF concert, a survey of young people, a contest for sending youth ambassadors to the special session and the presentation of an Asian youth charter at the special session.

23. In the East Asia and Pacific regions, partnerships with children to promote the Convention were supported in Thailand, Malaysia and Viet Nam by means of media events, artwork and peer education. Children also had the opportunity to present the issues and challenges of concern to them and to engage in dialogue with top leaders in the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. In Eastern Europe, parliaments of children and young people have been established in Albania, Georgia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Moldova and Ukraine. These parliaments have become a part of the Global Movement for Children and young parliamentarians have participated in the end-of-decade review process. The election process has been widely highlighted through media coverage and a series of films for television. The sessions provided the children and young people in these countries with a forum to discuss human rights and the factors or issues that affect their lives.

24. The Office of the High Commissioner places a high priority on the establishment and strengthening of independent, broad-based national human rights institutions, which are among the most important vehicles for promoting and monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child at the national level. The Office encourages national human rights commissions to designate a commissioner or focal point for issues related to the rights of the child. Several national human rights commissions, such as those in South Africa and the Philippines, have acknowledged the special protection that children require by creating specific policy guidelines for the work related to children's rights. Others, such as the Australian Human Rights Commission have conducted major inquiries into the rights of homeless and indigenous children.

25. National institutions have also emphasized the importance of child rights in various regional forums. Participants in the Third Regional Conference of National African Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, held from 14 to 16 March 2001, discussed the exploitation of children. They expressed deep concern that the situation of children remains critical owing to several factors, including their exploitation for commercial and sexual purposes, trafficking and sale, and enlistment in armed conflict. Participants recommended that effective action be taken as a matter of urgency at the national and international levels. The Advisory Council of Jurists of the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions considered, during its inaugural session held during the Forum's fifth annual meeting in August 2000, the issue of the dissemination of child pornography on the Internet and the role of the State in regulating its transmission. In the Asia Pacific Conference on the Use of Children as Soldiers, the Advisory Council contributed to discussions aimed at raising general awareness of the problem and encouraging Governments, regional bodies and international organizations to commit themselves to its eradication and to drawing up plans and programmes in that regard.

V. Protection and promotion of the rights of children in particularly vulnerable situations and non-discrimination against children

A. Plight of children living and/or working on the streets

26. Several initiatives supported by UNICEF attempt to reintegrate children working and living on the streets with their families and into community support

programmes. Residential centres for street children were established in China, Sierra Leone, Angola, Ethiopia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Malawi. In China, street children protection centres have served approximately 5,600 children between 1996 and 2000. Encouraged by the good results, the Government has established 80 new centres. In Ethiopia, 2,000 street children received health cards to access public health facilities. Street children have been provided with school uniforms and educational material, and sports facilities have also been provided to them in six towns. In Albania, a project conducted in selected schools of four cities ensures the access of street children to school through the creation of specially designed classes. In these classes, teachers provide additional lessons to children who have already dropped out or are at high risk of doing so, thus ensuring them a chance to reintegrate into regular schools.

27. Within the framework of technical cooperation and through its International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, ILO continued its work to help children in vulnerable situations, including those living and/or working on the streets. These children are often victims of the worst forms of child labour, including commercial sexual exploitation, forced recruitment for use in armed conflict, and drug trafficking. ILO and UNICEF developed a rapid assessment methodology to obtain quantitative and qualitative data on the situation and context of children in vulnerable situations. The results of the methodology are reflected in the direct interventions made under projects in a number of countries.

B. Refugee and internally displaced children

28. Although in recent years there has been heightened awareness of the plight of internally displaced persons, greater attention still needs to be paid to the especially vulnerable among them, in particular the large numbers of children who have special protection and assistance needs. To this end, the establishment in September 2000 of the Senior Inter-Agency Network on Internal Displacement has been an encouraging step. The Network, which has undertaken missions to Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Eritrea and Ethiopia, to review the inter-agency response in those countries, has paid due regard to the situation of internally displaced children. During late 2001, the Network will be superseded by a coordination unit, based in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The unit is to undertake systematic reviews of selected countries to assess international efforts to meet the assistance and protection needs of internally displaced persons, including children, and to make recommendations for an improved response.

29. The overarching framework for the inter-agency response to internally displaced persons and thus for the activities of the Network and the unit, is provided by the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (see E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, annex). Save the Children (United Kingdom), in the context of an international campaign on the protection of children who are internally displaced by armed conflict, refers to the Guiding Principles as an important contribution in that regard, and encourages their active promotion.

30. The representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons continues to pay special attention to the particular needs of internally displaced children, as requested by the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights. In particular, the representative's country missions provide an important opportunity for advocacy on behalf of internally displaced children, such as during his recent missions to Angola and Georgia (see E/CN.4/2001/5/Adds.4-5). In addition, in May 2001, the office of the representative participated in the annual meeting of members of the International Save the Children Alliance, at which a statement delivered on behalf of the representative drew attention to the specific needs of internally displaced children, called for more systematic monitoring and reporting of their problems, for greater attention to be paid to the development of strategies for the protection of their human rights and for greater resources to meet these and other challenges.

31. In cooperation with other United Nations programmes and bodies and non-governmental organizations, UNICEF has provided emergency support to internally displaced children and women in Afghanistan. Supplies included winter clothes, shoes, cooking sets, blankets, drugs and vaccines. UNICEF has also secured nutritional surveillance, water and sanitation. In Colombia, the support provided to internally displaced persons involves the participation of the host population. In addition to providing basic

supplies, UNICEF runs psycho-affective recovery programmes which are implemented by young people and which address children's fear and psychosomatic illness. In the Sudan, UNICEF has initiated the rehabilitation of schools in internal displacement camps and in transitional zones. More than 1,300 educational kits and other school supplies and equipment were provided for 122,000 children in the camps. UNICEF also established new learning centres at Juba for adolescent girls, providing educational opportunities for 2,500 girls.

32. ILO provides assistance to prevent the worst forms of child labour in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, in particular in the internal displacement camps which gather together people who have lost access to their main source of income, their land. The concerns are that displaced children are often drawn into illicit activities, including the sale of illegal alcohol and prostitution, or recruited into armed opposition groups.

33. A senior network on internal displacement was established at UNHCR with the aim of coordinating the work of the organizations concerned with such specific issues as the right to education, health (including the issue of HIV/AIDS), family reunification and recruitment. It scheduled several missions to countries in which women and children comprise the majority of the affected population, namely, Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Eritrea and Ethiopia. In follow-up to the inter-agency mission, UNHCR Angola is expected to receive US$ 3.3 million, or 35 per cent of its US$ 11.5 million emergency appeal for internally displaced persons, by the end of 2001.

34. Some 10 million out of the 22.3 million refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR are children under the age of 18 years. The UNHCR strategy involves the prioritization of certain child concerns, and the Office is currently focusing in particular on separated children, adolescents and education. The UNHCR policy on refugee children applies to children and adolescents under 18 years of age, and its guidelines on the protection and care of refugee children provide the overall protection and assistance framework for addressing the issues that affect them. Increased emphasis is being placed on an inter-agency approach to addressing issues of common concern, such as training and capacity-building activities.

35. A primary concern is to ensure that protection is translated into activities that encompass and benefit refugee children as well as other categories of refugees. One particular aspect with an important bearing on children is that of maintaining the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps and settlements and of ensuring the physical safety of refugees. UNHCR recently adopted measures in relation to camp security. These measures included the establishment of standby arrangements, which initially involved a limited number of Governments, for the provision of law and order and public security experts who will be known as humanitarian security officers.

36. In collaboration with Save the Children, UNICEF and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNHCR developed the project known as Action for the Rights of Children. The project provides training and capacity-building initiatives for the staff of UNHCR, as well as those of governmental and non-governmental partners.

37. In 1999, UNHCR and the Save the Children Alliance implemented the Separated Children in Europe Programme, a joint programme which seeks to ensure respect for the rights and best interests of separated children and adolescents arriving in Europe. Another interesting model of joint efforts is a project for separated children in Guinea.

38. The Inter-Agency Group on Separated Children is an initiative which involves UNHCR, UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Rescue Committee, World Vision and Save the Children (United Kingdom). It seeks to develop capacities for a more coordinated response, from the emergency phase onwards, to problems of separation. The group is in the process of developing joint guiding principles which should be issued in 2001.

39. During 2000, significant results were achieved among accompanied and separated adolescents, especially those in situations of responsibility for themselves and others. Many who have not been able to find foster families, and others who have assumed responsibility for younger children, have benefited from post-primary education, vocational training and income-generating opportunities. Examples of such activities are the vocational skill-training programme in Azerbaijan, the small business management project in Burkina Faso and the assistance programme in Burundi. In Myanmar, special assistance is given to

unaccompanied and separated children to enable them to become self-sufficient.

40. Increasing the access of refugee children to schooling, in particular for girls, remains one of the main priorities of UNHCR. While UNHCR endeavours to ensure access to primary schooling for all refugee children, fewer possibilities are available for children at the post-primary level.

41. A number of pilot educational projects on peace, human rights and conflict resolution have been undertaken both in schools and through adult education. One current project is a school programme in refugee camps in Kenya, which includes peace education classes, with some 42,000 children receiving peace education lessons every week. Some 9,000 young people and adults have graduated from the community workshop programme. Similar peace education schemes have been implemented in Uganda, Liberia and Guinea, and consultations are under way to establish similar programmes in Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. UNHCR efforts in this area aim to give refugee teachers and refugees a solid training in human rights and conflict resolution so that they can disseminate these concepts more widely.

C. Children with disabilities

42. UNICEF runs programmes aimed at promoting respect for the rights of disabled children, ranging from the prevention of discrimination to the provision of access to services such as health care and education, as well as protecting them from abuse and exploitation. For instance, in Yemen, UNICEF supported the work of two local non-governmental organizations for the elaboration of a school curriculum for blind children which would assist their integration into mainstream education. In collaboration with a local non-governmental organization, UNICEF also developed a programme which provides children with hearing problems with some care and a hearing aid, thereby enabling them to attend normal schools. It further organized, in collaboration with a local non-governmental organization, the training of teachers working with mentally handicapped children. In Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, UNICEF has been encouraging the development of community and family-based services for disabled children as an alternative to their confinement in institutions.

43. In the Russian Federation, specialists and parents from all over the country were trained in modern techniques of providing home-based care, rehabilitation and socialization of children with various disabilities. In Belarus, UNICEF is utilizing parent support groups to raise the capacity of parents to take care of their disabled children at home. With a view to attracting public attention to the situation of children with disabilities in Ukraine, UNICEF developed a package of printed and video materials, as well as video spots for television. UNICEF activities in the Islamic Republic of Iran focused on special education. Working to sensitize officials to the issue of disabled children, UNICEF supported the participation of selected governmental officials in training sessions on mainstreaming, provision of special education and facilitation of outside activities. As a result, there is now strong support for more inclusive education in the country.

VI. Prevention and eradication of the sale of children and of their sexual exploitation, including child prostitution and child pornography

44. In 2001, the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography focused upon the role of the private sector. A circular letter requesting information in this regard was sent to international chambers of commerce and non-governmental organizations in June 2000.

45. In her report to the Commission at its fifty-seventh session (E/CN.4/2001/78 and Add.1-2), the Special Rapporteur presented an overview of the current debate surrounding the private sector and international human rights standards. In outlining the legal context, the Special Rapporteur concluded that the private sector does have certain responsibilities, drawing upon the examples of the ILO standards, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. She also made reference to the draft principles relating to the human rights conduct of companies being developed in the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, by its sessional working group on the working methods and activities of transnational corporations. The particular concerns of the Special

Rapporteur with respect to the private sector included child labour, the media, transport and tourism, which were considered in the light of information received from international chambers of commerce and non-governmental organizations. Her report concluded with a summary of some of the positive initiatives taken by companies and their employees to help children in the communities close to their areas of operation.

46. In addressing sexual exploitation and child trafficking in its country programmes, UNICEF focuses on improving access to, and the quality of, education, especially for girls; providing economic support to families to reduce the risk of sexual exploitation; raising awareness of sexual exploitation and its consequences; and promoting the rights of the child. On this basis, several initiatives have been undertaken in East Asia. For example, in Thailand, a national workshop on trafficking in children and women in which representatives of Cambodia, Myanmar and China, as well as approximately 100 national governmental and non-governmental organizations took part, resulted in the drawing up of a draft implementation plan between Cambodia and Thailand to address the situation of children trafficked across borders between the two countries.

47. In Nepal, UNICEF supported training programmes for the Nepalese police on investigating and ensuring the efficient process of cases involving children trafficked across borders. In Eastern Europe, UNICEF led campaigns targeting vulnerable populations, aimed at raising awareness of trafficking. It also supported public awareness-raising by means of television programmes in Moldova and Kyrgyzstan. In December 2000, UNICEF, together with the World Bank and the World Health Organization, organized a conference on child abuse and neglect in Romania. Collaboration with other United Nations organizations in this field in West and Central Africa led to the signature of a memorandum of cooperation with the International Organization for Migration, aimed at combating trafficking in children and women in the region, and of a memorandum of understanding with UNESCO on the follow-up to the World Education Forum, held at Dakar in April 2000.

48. Over the past year, UNICEF has also paid increasing attention to child marriage, as part of its broader approach to gender discrimination, which undermines the rights of women and children. UNICEF released a new report, *Early Marriage: Child Spouses*,[5] which indicates that early marriage practices continue in many countries and may be on the rise among extremely poor populations and discusses how this constitutes a violation of children's rights.

49. In addition, the global Girls' Education Programme of UNICEF operates in more than 60 countries, with the aims of ensuring that girls have equal access to education, which is a key to their overall development, and of protecting them from violations of their rights, such as early marriage, economic or sexual exploitation. For example, UNICEF has supported the development of successful initiatives in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, two regions with high rates of child marriage. The Meena initiative in South Asia is named after the young cartoon heroine of a multi-media package on the rights of girls and serves as a catalyst for discussion on gender discrimination in childhood. Building on the success of that initiative, the Sara Adolescent Girl Communication initiative has been further expanded in 10 countries of eastern and southern Africa. The importance of staying in school is one of the main messages of this radio series.

50. The entry into force on 19 November 2000 of ILO Convention No. 182, concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, is a positive step towards the prevention and eradication of the sale, sexual abuse and exploitation (including prostitution and pornography) of children. It explicitly prohibits the use of children below the age of 18 years in such activities. The record-breaking speed of ratification of the Convention bears witness to the growing international consensus that immediate action be taken to prohibit and eliminate the sexual exploitation of children.

51. ILO has a major contribution to make to the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, to be held at Yokohama, Japan, from 17 to 20 December 2001. This is evident given the extensive technical experience of ILO concerning trafficking and sexual exploitation, and the international standards that it has established, especially Convention No. 182. The concrete action taken by ILO on the issue has been strengthened following the First Congress, held at Stockholm in 1996. In the Greater Mekong subregion of East Asia, ILO assists countries in effectively combating trafficking in children and women. This includes investment in monitoring and coordination mechanisms

at the subregional, national and subnational levels, social mobilization and improved legislation, law enforcement and policies, as well as direct action to prevent trafficking at the community level. The same strategy is replicated in South Asia and Central and West Africa, where children are trafficked for sexual exploitation or are exploited at work, such as in domestic work or on plantations. In Central and Latin America, ILO is undertaking research on the commercial sexual exploitation of children in Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. A direct action programme on the border between Paraguay and Brazil is expected to begin in the near future. Research will be used to define communication and information campaigns, and to orient strategies for the sustainable withdrawal and rehabilitation of children. In Nepal and the United Republic of Tanzania, sexual exploitation and trafficking are included in the integrated time-bound programme against the worst forms of child labour (see sect. VI below for further details of the programme).

VII. Protection of children affected by armed conflict

52. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights gives particular attention to children affected by armed conflict, partially in the context of its commitment to the integration of the rights of children into many aspects of its work. This is done by undertaking specific activities which focus on the protection of children's rights in conflict situations. By means of its field presence, the Office conducts human rights investigations, monitoring, reporting and technical cooperation activities, focusing at times on the specific situation of children. In this regard, the Office published, in 2001, a guide for human rights staff working in the field, in which attention is given to the rights of children in general, and specifically in situations of armed conflict. Further examples of field initiatives focusing on children in armed and post conflict include, inter alia, the joint initiative undertaken in Sierra Leone in June 2001 by the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF and the National Forum of Human Rights to address the participation of children in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Arrangements are under way for the further deployment of field staff with experience in children's rights to various human rights field offices.

53. The Office of the High Commissioner liaises and cooperates with the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF and many concerned international non-governmental organizations. Examples of collaboration over the year under review include the participation of the Office in research activities of the Special Representative, a joint training initiative for peacekeepers on the rights of children, the Action for the Rights of Children initiative of UNHCR and the Save the Children Alliance, and work with the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

54. Since 1998, the Commission on Human Rights has considered the abduction of children from northern Uganda for use in the armed conflict in the region. In its resolution 2000/60 of 26 April 2000,[6] the Commission requested the Office of the High Commissioner to undertake an assessment of the situation on the ground in the affected areas, including the needs of the victims, in full consultation with the relevant United Nations organizations and non-governmental organizations, and to report to the Commission at its fifty-seventh session. A mission was undertaken from 17 March to 6 April 2001. Three days were spent in Khartoum, two days in Nairobi, and about two weeks in Uganda, one week of which was spent in the north where the Lord's Resistance Army, which has been responsible for many abductions, acts of murder, and the torture and rape of children as well as adults, has been active since 1986. Members of the mission met with many individuals and organizations representing the Government of Uganda and the Government of the Sudan, relevant United Nations organizations, international organizations, donor countries, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, traditional leaders, the media and religious groups. In addition, they met with and interviewed many children and adults who had recently escaped from the Lord's Resistance Army. The High Commissioner for Human Rights informed the Commission on Human Rights of the preliminary findings of the mission on 19 April 2001; the final report will be considered by the Commission at its fifty-eighth session in 2002.

55. UNICEF co-hosted a meeting of experts during the International Conference on War-Affected Children, held at Winnipeg, Canada, from 10 to 17 September 2000. A ministerial declaration establishing an agenda for action at the local, national, regional and international levels emanated from the Conference, and initiatives were proposed for consideration by the General Assembly during its special session on children.

56. In accordance with its call for an end to the use of child soldiers, UNICEF collaborated with the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers in holding a signing event in connection with the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict during the Millennium Summit. UNICEF has issued guidelines to offices regarding consistent messages to government regarding the need to identify 18 years as the minimum age for voluntary and compulsory recruitment in armed forces. In addition, it has encouraged general debate on the rights of children in conflict situations by, inter alia, providing extensive input to reports of the Secretary-General to, and debates in, the Security Council.

57. This work has included a focus on reducing the devastating impact of the licit and illicit traffic of small arms and light weapons on children's rights. Efforts in programming, research and advocacy addressed the impact of small arms on children, their widespread availability, their low cost and ease of handling, and the fact that their presence encourages the involvement of children in conflict. UNICEF is also involved in the Inter-Agency Reference Group on Small Arms, which has initiated a major study on the humanitarian impact of small arms.

58. Together with other organizations of the United Nations system and on the basis of the above-mentioned study, UNICEF is advocating that the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects give full weight to the humanitarian perspective in its deliberations.

59. In Sierra Leone, UNICEF, in partnership with others, supports programmes for the care of, and the provision of psychosocial support to, children, promotes the demobilization of child soldiers, sensitization of the family and community and capacity-building in the relevant ministry, and encourages increased cooperation with non-governmental organizations. Over the past year, UNICEF has advocated the creation of a truth commission in Sierra Leone. On the basis of the principles on the rights of the child, the commission would consider the plight of child soldiers and establish appropriate means of reintegrating them into their communities.

60. ILO contributes to the protection of children in armed conflict. ILO Convention No. 182 requires that immediate and effective measures be taken to prohibit and eliminate the forced recruitment of boys and girls under 18 years of age for use in armed conflict. This includes time-bound measures to prevent such recruitment, and to demobilize and rehabilitate child victims, taking into account the special needs of girls. The ILO Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction has built up expertise with regard to training and livelihood options for ex-combatants. Together with the ILO Child Labour Programme, the former is promoting the social and economic reintegration of demobilized child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo after the ceasefire agreement of July 1999. ILO is laying the groundwork (i.e., collecting data to devise a strategy for concerted action) for a similar programme in the Great Lakes region.

VIII. Progressive elimination of child labour

61. The progressive elimination of child labour, in particular its worst forms, is a key to the eradication of poverty and to the establishment of the human resource base necessary for national development. The ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998) reaffirms that the effective abolition of child labour is among the basic elements of an integrating global economy, since it is essential to ensuring that economic growth translates into equity, social progress and the eradication of poverty.

62. ILO considers the elimination of child labour to be part and parcel of its central effort to promote decent work for all women and men in conditions of freedom, equality, security and human dignity.

63. A strong moral and financial commitment to the eradication of child labour has been made by a wide range of stakeholders, including numerous

Governments, private sector organizations and civil society groups, through the adoption and establishment of standard-setting and monitoring mechanisms, in particular ILO Conventions Nos. 138 and 182. The ratification of those two instruments has shown a remarkable increase in recent years. As at 20 June 2001, 109 States had ratified Convention No. 138 and 85 had ratified Convention No. 182.

64. The technical cooperation activities of ILO, carried out within the context of its International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, continue to expand both in the number of countries receiving assistance and the total budget. It should be underlined, however, that the issue of immediate priority is the worst forms of child labour, as defined by Convention No. 182. ILO is developing a new integrated approach through time-bound programmes to assist Governments in taking action to combat the worst forms of child labour within a specified time frame.

65. Targeting the worst forms of child labour is an emerging priority for the international community, and experience has shown that it is also an effective way to mobilize society to address the problem of child labour. Successful measures against the worst forms of child labour often have a multiplier effect that benefits other working children. Once Governments and civil society begin to focus on the worst forms of child labour, broad discussions about the acceptability of other forms of child labour and the feasibility of eliminating those that are unacceptable generally follow. Such programmes have been launched in three countries, El Salvador, Nepal and the United Republic of Tanzania, which have expressed a particularly strong commitment towards eradicating the worst forms of child labour.

66. ILO is currently preparing a global report on child labour which the International Labour Conference will discuss in June 2002. The report is part of the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

67. The strategy of UNICEF regarding child labour has three dimensions: provision of adapted education; interventions targeted at family economies to enhance their capability in providing for and protecting their children; and awareness-raising campaigns at all levels of society to promote the rights of children, ensure that they are respected and fulfilled, and ensure that law enforcement effectively suppresses the demand for child labour. Its emerging global strategy for combating child labour is based on this multisectoral approach, with a focus on prevention.

68. Preventive action implies a focus on the reduction of school dropout rates. In Lebanon, for example, interventions have consisted of promoting extension of the law on free and compulsory education up to the age of 15 years (instead of 12), as well as attempting to give working children an opportunity to acquire functional literacy and basic life skills. In Senegal, educational alternatives were provided to children recruited into the worst forms of child labour. UNICEF provided school equipment, furniture, manuals, improved infrastructural conditions and pedagogical reinforcement. These interventions reached 4,000 children.

69. In Peru, UNICEF supported the establishment of community defence centres in the gold mining areas of Madre de Dios. These centres promote the right of children and adolescents to a quality education and further facilitated the commitments of miners not to employ child workers. In Haiti, a public awareness campaign on child domestic servants was launched under the theme "Fight against modern slavery" by a UNICEF-supported non-governmental organization in 2000. In India, information and advocacy work by UNICEF has increased the visibility of domestic child labour.

Notes

[1] For the list of States that have signed, ratified or acceded to the Convention, as well as the dates of their signature, ratification or accession, see A/55/41, annex I.

[2] For the list of States that have signed, ratified or acceded to the optional protocols to the Convention, as well as the dates of their signature, ratification or accession, see CRC/C/108, annexes II and III.

[3] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2001, Supplement No. 3* (E/2001/23), chap. II, sect. A.

[4] For the reports of the Committee on these sessions, see CRC/C/100, CRC/C/103 and CRC/C/108, respectively.

[5] UNICEF and Innocenti Research Centre, *Innocenti Digest*, No. 7, March 2001.

[6] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2000, Supplement No. 3* and corrigendum (E/2000/23 and Corr.1), chap. II, sect. A.